ELY DISTRICT
CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION (CX) REVIEW
AND APPROVAL

Team Leader Craig Hoover Date September 06, 2006

Name of Proposed Action Bastian Creek Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project

CX Number: CX-NV-040-06- 29 Project or Serial Number: 004F

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REFERENCE

516 Departmental Manual 1.12—Hazardous fuels reduction activities using prescribed fire not to exceed 4,500 acres, and mechanical methods for crushing, piling, thinning, pruning, cutting, chipping, mulching, and mowing not to exceed 1,000 acres. Such activities shall be limited to areas (1) in wildland-urban interface and (2) Condition Classes 2 or 3 in Fire Regime Groups I, II, or III, outside of the wildland-urban interface; Shall be identified through a collaborative framework as described in "A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment 10-year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan;" Shall be conducted consistent with agency and Departmental procedures and applicable land and resource management plans; Shall not be conducted in wilderness areas or impair the suitability of wilderness study areas for preservation as wilderness; Shall not include the use of herbicides or pesticides or the construction of new permanent roads or other new permanent infrastructure; and may include the sale of vegetative materials if the primary purpose of the activity is hazardous fuels reduction.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

The BLM, in cooperation with Delamar Valley Cattle Company proposes to implement a sagebrush fuels reduction project on approximately 1000 acres of big sagebrush/black greasewood co-dominated sites within the Spring Valley Watershed. The project area is approximately 1400 acres and located approximately 20 miles southeast of Ely, Nevada (Map 1). The area is located entirely within the Spring Valley watershed. Vegetation in the project area consists of blackgrease wood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus)* communities and sagebrush (*Artemesia spp.*) communities.

The area is shrub dominated with very limited to no understory and shrub age classes are mature and decadent. The project would be designed to reduce shrub composition and cover in shrub dominated sites, followed by seeding desirable perennial grasses and forbs. This would decrease the intensity and rate of spread if any wildfires were to occur within the plant community of the proposed treatment area. The seeding of fire resistant and tolerant species that are adapted to site characteristics would buffer the plant community against invasive and undesirable plant species

encroaching upon the proposed area after a wild fire event.

The proposal is to pull a pasture aerator (aka, brush crusher) with an attached seedbox over the area. Settings on the aerator would be regulated to achieve a decreased shrub cover and composition desirable for fuels reduction, and to regulate seed rates. Seeding would occur at the same time of the shrub treatment.

Brush crushing and seeding would be conducted in an east-west direction.The Shrub crushing would be conducted in a mosaic fashion by crushing shrub strips incorporating irregular (non-straight) boundary lines. Seeded species in the proposed mechanical treatment area would include perennial, fire resistant and tolerant species that are adapted to site characteristics. Seed to be used would be certified weed-free.

Several seeding trials, less than one acre each, will be conducted in areas outside the proposed project area on ecological sites differing from those within the proposed treatment area (i. e. greasewood and great basin wild rye sites). The seed would be applied manually with hand seeders. The trials would provide research data for potential future projects within the Spring Valley watershed region. Seeded species in the proposed seeding trial treatment area would include perennial, fire resistant and tolerant species that are adapted to site characteristics. Seed to be used would be certified weed-free.

During the year in which prescribed treatments are to be conducted, livestock will not be allowed to graze within the proposed treatment units. Livestock grazing would be excluded from the treated units for two full years following treatment implementation. After two years grazing exclusion, or when vegetation cover objectives have been met, livestock would be allowed to graze the project area. An interdisciplinary team would conduct a review of project monitoring data and objectives to determine when and if livestock grazing should be allowed in the project area. If after the two-year rest period, environmental factors prevent attainment of the objectives, an interdisciplinary team would review project monitoring data and determine an appropriate grazing regime with permittees. Any terms and conditions specific to livestock grazing within the area would also be discussed and included in any grazing authorization.

All treatment actions would comply with *Ely District Policy Management Actions for the Conservation of Migratory Birds* (Instruction Memorandum NV-040-2001-02).

Suitable pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*) habitat would be surveyed prior to conducting ground disturbing activities. Mowing pattern designs that would minimize impact to any occupied pygmy rabbit habitat would be incorporated. A mosaic treatment design would be incorporated to minimize impacts to pygmy rabbit habitat.

A class III cultural inventory of the proposed project area occurred on March 14, April 4, June 14, and July 17 of 2006A total of two prehistoric isolates were located during the cultural inventory. These isolates will be avoided by project design.

A survey for mining claim markers in documented active claim sites would occur prior to conducting treatments. All mining claim marker locations and tag information would be recorded. Active mining claim markers that are destroyed or damaged would be re-staked using a legal mining claim marker. Re-staking of mining claim markers would occur in coordination with the existing mining claimants to assure accurate, legal staking procedures that would minimize damage to claims.

The Ely Field Office Noxious Weed Prevention Schedule would be adhered to during all phases of project implementation. Mitigation measures identified in the weed risk assessment (Appendix1) would be implemented as part of the proposed action. All equipment would be required to be weed free prior to entering the project area.

All above ground structures associated with buried utility lines would also be avoided in the proposed mechanical treatment area. Right-of-way (ROW) holders would be notified as soon as possible prior to conducting any project implementation in the area.

The project area would be monitored before, during, and after implementation. Monitoring data collected before the project would determine which areas to target for fuels reduction, which areas to seed after treatments, and to compare post-treatment affects. All monitoring techniques would follow BLM approved methods. All monitoring site locations would be marked and recorded. Common methods expected to be used would be line and point intercept for cover, and photographs; however, any approved methods could be used. Starting one year after the treatment, and continuing each year throughout the livestock closure period, pre-treatment monitoring points and others as deemed appropriate would be monitored. At each monitoring point, understory species response would be measured using a combination of line or point intercept, photos, and documentation of general observations of plant response and vigor. Post-treatment monitoring of shrub and understory response would be monitored annually for a minimum of three years following treatments. After the first three years, the project would be monitored at least every third year. Noxious weed detection would also be incorporated into all monitoring activities. If noxious weeds were found, measures would be taken to suppress the weeds. Suppression measures would include reporting the weeds to the Ely Field Office Weed Coordinator to be included on the weed treatment schedule as soon as possible.

The project resource objectives are:

Short Term (immediately post treatment)

Reduce overstory plant cover (i.e., tree and shrubs) within the project area in a mosaic pattern affecting between 70% and 90% of the target area (1000 acres).

Long Term (five to ten years post treatment)

Increase crown or basal cover of desirable species to 75% of the potential of the ecological site by the tenth year after treatment. Desirable species and target cover value (basal and crown) by ecological site are identified in the table below. Desirable species will be key species used to determine effective ground cover.

Table 1. Desirable Species by Ecological Site, Potential And Target Ground Cover For The Spring Valley Fuels Reduction Project For Ecological Sites of The Project Area (1000 acres).

Rangesite (28BY0__)	Potential Ground Cover	Target Ground Cover	Desirable Grasses	Desirable Forbs	Desirable Shrubs
28	10-20%	7.0%	20%	5%	75%
			LECI4 ACHY	STANL THELY SPHAE	SAVE4 ARTR2 ARTRT ARTRW ATCO KOAM KRLA2 GRSP
(28AY0_	Potential Ground Cover	Target Ground Cover	Desirable Grasses	Desirable Forbs	Desirable Shrubs
08	5-15%	3.5%	55%	5%	40%
			PSSP ACHY HECO POSE FEPO	CRAC2 HAPLO2	ARNO4 ATCO KRLA2

Pre-treatment inventory data would be collected prior to implementing treatments to establish baseline vegetation conditions. Inventory and monitoring data would be collected using BLM approved methods. A monitoring plan for the project area would be developed prior to

conducting treatments.

Before treatment, vegetation cover data, point intercept and/or line intercept, would be collected on all ecological sites. These data would be collected at plots that would be either established randomly or by choosing areas that represent the typical vegetative conditions. Photo plots would also be established in addition to data collection plots.

All treatment actions would comply with the *Ely District Policy Management Actions for the Conservation of Migratory Birds* (Instruction Memorandum NV-040-2001-02). No prescribed burning would be conducted during the migratory bird nesting period, unless the entire area is surveyed and no nesting birds are found in the area.

No new roads or trails would be created. Off-road travel would be limited to that necessary to safely and practically achieve resource objectives.

The Ely District Noxious Weed Prevention Schedule and Policy would be adhered to during project treatments. Recommendations contained in the Weed Risk Assessment for the project would be followed.

Areas identified as having limited seedbanks as a result of low understory species density would be seeded using certified weed-free native seed. These areas would be identified after collecting pre-treatment inventory data.

Livestock grazing would be excluded from the project area for a minimum of two full growing seasons or until the vegetation objectives listed below have been met:

The sagebrush ecological sites (black, Basin big and Wyoming big sagebrush): ground cover (basal and crown) values of desirable perennial vegetation species (listed in table above) should be at least 3.5 % for the NV28AY008 site and 7% for theNV28BY028 site by the tenth year after treatment .

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

Letters describing the project objectives and intent to complete this project were mailed to individuals and groups who have expressed interest in participating in hazardous fuels reduction projects as well as state and federal wildlife agencies.

During the scoping period, comments were received from Confederated Tribes of the Goshute Indian Reservation, Nevada Department of Wildlife, Western Watersheds Project and Martin Bell. Comments received were incorporated as appropriate into the development of the proposed action. The project design and objectives were also developed as a result of consultation with the science community (Eastern Nevada Landscape Coalition and The Nature conservancy).

The specialists listed in Table 2 below were involved in reviewing the proposed action for impacts and the screening questions (listed below) for Categorical Exclusions. **Table 2.** Specialist involved in reviewing the proposed action for exceptions to National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusions:

NAME	**RESOURCE ASSIGNED**
Craig Hoover	Rangeland Resources/Livestock Grazing/Noxious and Invasive Weeds
Mark Henderson	Cultural Resources
Paul Podborny	Wildlife, Fisheries, Forestry, Threatened/Endangered/Sensitive Species
Elvis Wall	Native American Religious Concerns and Coordination
Carolyn Sherve-Bybee	NEPA Coordination
Gary Medlyn	Soils

SCREENING FOR EXCEPTIONS TO CATEGORICAL EXCLUSIONS

The following exceptions apply to actions being considered as categorically excluded. Environmental documents must be prepared if any of these exceptions apply. Place an "X" in appropriate box. Would the proposed action:	**Yes**	**No**
1. have significant adverse effects on public health or safety?		X
2. have adverse effects on such unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources, park, recreation or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, or ecologically significant or critical areas, including those listed on the Department's National Register of Natural Landmarks?		X
3. have highly controversial environmental effects?		X
4. have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?		X
5. establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?		X
6. be directly related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?		X
7. have adverse effects on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places?		X
8. have adverse effects on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species?		X
9. require compliance with Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act?		X
10. threaten to violate a Federal, State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment?		X

FINDINGS

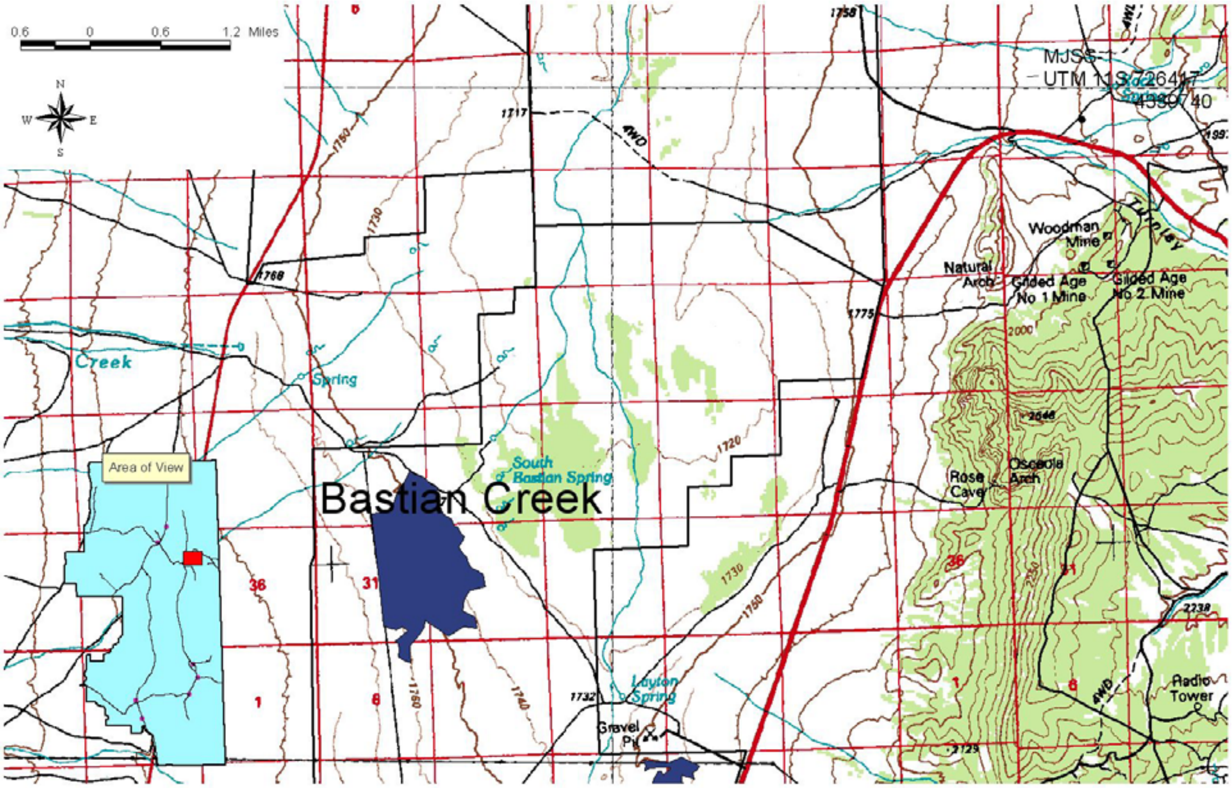
Based on review of the proposal and the ten exceptions listed above, this action qualifies as a categorical exclusion and an environmental analysis is not required. The proposed action is in conformance with current BLM Land Use Plans.

Approving Official: _____ Date: _____

William E. Dunn
Fire Management Officer

APPENDIX

Map 1



0.6 0 0.6 1.2 Miles
N
W
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MJSS-1
Woodman Mine
Natural Arch
Gilded Age No 1 Mine
Gilded Age No 2 Mine
Creek
Spring
Area of View
South Bastian Spring
Bastian Creek
Rose Cave
Osceola Arch
Layton Spring
Gravel Pit
Radio Tower
4WD

Project Name: Bastian Creek Fuels Reduction Project

RISK ASSESSMENT FOR NOXIOUS/INVASIVE WEEDS

Directions: This document is intended for electronic use. Adjust the spacing as necessary. Retain one copy of this document with your project files. Provide the Weed Coordinator with a second copy of the form and a project map.

Date Risk Assessment was completed: 09/06/06

Steps taken to complete Risk Assessment: Coordinated with Weeds specialists for input.

Project Description:
The BLM, in cooperation with Delamar Valley Cattle Company proposes to implement a sagebrush fuels reduction project on approximately 1000 acres within the proposed project area, which is approximately 1400 acres in size, of big sagebrush/black greasewood co-dominated sites within the Spring Valley Watershed. Vegetation in the project area consists of blackgrease wood (*Sarcobatus vermiculatus)* communities and sagebrush (*Artemesia spp.*) communities.

Project Location:
The project area is located approximately 20 miles southeast of Ely, Nevada The area is located entirely within the Spring Valley watershed.

Factor 1:
A definition of Factor 1 appears in Appendix A. Factor 1 assesses the likelihood of noxious/invasive weed species spreading to the project area. For this project, the factor rates as **(Moderate, 5)** at the present time. This rating was based on the following findings:

Due to the nature of the project, there is a moderate risk of areas becoming infested with noxious weeds as some adjacent areas to the project do have invasive species, primarily cheatgrass, but very few invasive weeds within the project area.

Factor 2:
A definition of Factor 2 appears in Appendix A. Factor 2 assesses the consequences of noxious/invasive weed establishment in the project area. For this project, the factor rates as **(Moderate, 5)**. This rating was based on the following findings:

Due to the nature of the project and invasive weeds within areas adjacent to project, the expansion and introduction of weed populations is possible.

Risk Rating:
The Risk Rating is obtained by multiplying Factor 1 by Factor 2. For this project, the Risk Rating is **(Moderate, 25**).

Based on this risk rating, preventative management measures **(are)**/ are not needed for this project. Preventative management measures developed for this project are as follows:

Preventative measures to help mitigate the possible effects of the race on the native plant communities include:

Preventative measures:

Take before and after observation photos of key impact and possible weed vector areas.

Active measures:

Insure the equipment to used in implementing the project is sprayed down and hauled by trailor to the project site.

Reactive measures:

Notify the proper weed control agency concerning treating any populations of noxious weeds observed following the project implementation. Establish photo point sites at key locations (as outlined in the BLM rangeland guide). Revisit these monitoring points for three years to monitor any changes related to weeds. Monitor any known infestations and do follow up treatments as necessary .

Based on this risk rating, project modifications are/ **(are not)** needed for this project. Project modifications developed for this project are as follows.

Weed Risk Assessment completed by: Craig Hoover- RMS

Reviewed by/Date Reviewed: _____ Date_____
Noxious Weed Coordinator

Appendix A:

Factor 1

NONE (0): Noxious/invasive weed species not located within or adjacent to the project area. Project activity is not likely to result in the establishment of noxious/invasive weed species in the project area.

LOW (1-3): Noxious/invasive weed species present in areas adjacent to but not within the project area. Project activities can be implemented and prevent the spread of noxious/invasive weeds into the project area.

MODERATE (4-7): Noxious/invasive weed species located immediately adjacent to or within the project area. Project activities are likely to result in some areas becoming infested with noxious weed species even when preventative management actions are followed. Control measures are essential to prevent the spread of noxious/invasive weeds within the project area.

HIGH (7-10): Heavy infestations of noxious/invasive weeds are located within or immediately adjacent to the project area. Project activities, even with preventative management actions, are likely to result in the establishment and spread of noxious/invasive weeds
on disturbed sites throughout much of the project area.

Factor 2

Low to Nonexistent (1-3): None. No cumulative effects expected.

MODERATE (4-7): Possible adverse effects on site and possible expansion of infestation within the project area. Cumulative effects on native plant communities are likely, but limited.

HIGH (7-10): Obvious adverse effects within the project area and probable expansion of noxious weed infestations to areas outside the project area. Adverse cumulative effects on native plant communities are probable.

Risk Rating

NONE (0): Proceed as planned.

LOW (1-10): Proceed as planned. Initiate control treatment on noxious weed populations that get established in the area.

MODERATE (11-49): Develop preventative management measures for proposed
project to reduce the risk of introduction or spread of noxious weeds into the area. Preventative management measures should include modifying the project to include seeding the area to occupy disturbed sites with desirable species. Monitor area for at least 3 consecutive years and provide for control of newly established populations of noxious weeds and follow-up treatment for previously treated infestations.

HIGH (50-100):
Project must be modified to reduce risk level through preventative management measures, including seeding with desirable species to occupy disturbed sites and controlling existing infestations of noxious weeds prior to project activity. Project must provide at least 5 consecutive years of monitoring. Projects must also provide for control of newly established populations of noxious weeds and follow-up treatment for previously treated

infestations.